



**NARAL
Pro-Choice Connecticut**

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: *JILLIAN GILCHREST*
EXECUTIVE DIR.
NARAL Pro-Choice
Date: *2/29/08* Bill Number: *RHB-5591*

**Education Committee
Testimony of Jillian Gilchrest, Executive Director
NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut
Healthy Teens
February 29, 2008**

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am the Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut. The mission of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut is to develop and sustain a constituency that uses the political process to guarantee every woman the right to make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive health choices, including preventing unintended pregnancy, bearing healthy children, and choosing legal abortion.

I am here, like many of my colleagues from the Healthy Teens Coalition, to thank you for introducing House Bill 5591, An Act Concerning Healthy Teens, and to ask you to amend the bill language to read, "shall use such funding to provide comprehensive, medically accurate, and age appropriate sexuality education". As it reads now, "health education" could be interpreted to mean a lot of different subject matters, all of which are important, but Connecticut already has statute in regards to health education (Sec. 10-16c – 10-15f). What Connecticut doesn't have is a designated funding stream for sex education.

What we at the Healthy Teens Coalition, and now you here today have been told by teen pregnancy prevention professionals, grassroots organizers, and school personnel is that sexuality education is maybe one unit amongst an entire health curriculum that high school students receive. Firstly, high school is way too late to be teaching sex education and secondly, sex education needs to be an ongoing discussion, not a one-time unit.

Did you know that many of Connecticut's youth still experience the 4th or 5th grade talk-where the boys and girls are separated-to learn about sex and their body? And then in high school, if they attend a high school where sex education is a unit in the health curriculum, they receive sex education again, once more. Seems pretty crazy to me, that when I talk to friends twenty years my senior

about the sex education they received when they were young, it's the same thing youth in Connecticut are receiving right now.

Sex education, if ongoing, can protect and prevent young people from unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and unhealthy relationships. If taught once, it serves as a source of confusion and secrecy. When I was a senior in high school, not *too* long ago, my friends and I were having a heated debate over what time of the month a woman was most likely to get pregnant. Everyone was unsure, but we were able to reason that it must be during our period. Why else would we get it? It must have something to do with pregnancy.

My friends and I were all honors students, we were all planning to attend college, and we all only received sex education once, during a health class our junior year of high school. I tell this story, not only because my mom loves to tell it now that I work for a reproductive healthcare advocacy organization, but because when I went home to confirm our deduction about pregnancy and timing of the month, my mother was shocked by what my friends and I thought and questioned how it was we didn't know that. Why didn't I know what my period really was and why didn't I know what time of the month a woman is most fertile and most likely to become pregnant? My answer-I didn't know that because I was never taught it. Learning is an ongoing process, and that's true for sexuality education as well.

You've heard a lot of wonderful advocates testify today on the benefits of providing comprehensive, medically accurate, and age appropriate sexuality education. In light of recent studies, which show that abstinence-only-until marriage programs don't work and actually increase the risk of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections by discouraging contraceptive use, Connecticut has the opportunity to be a leader and proponent of prevention. By investing a million dollars in informing youth about how to stay healthy and avoid disease and unplanned pregnancy you will be making an investment in preventing costly health outcomes that the state often is forced to absorb down the road.

Connecticut's youth are being deprived of important information that they can use to make responsible choices. Please amend House Bill 5591 to address sexuality education. Thank you.